

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08

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FM AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5526

INFO USMISSION GENEVA

HQ USSOUTHCOM SCJ-2

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 MONTEVIDEO 5868

PASS TREASURY FOR I/A

GENEVA FOR MTN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EGEN, PDEV, ETRD, PINT, EALR, UY

SUBJ: NATIONAL CIVIL-MILITARY PLANNING CONFERENCE;

THE 1977 CONCLAVE

REF: MONTEVIDEO 5447

1. SUMMARY: THE ANNUAL GOU CIVIL-MILITARY PLANNING CONFERENCE, OR CONCLAVE, RECENTLY RAN ITS NINE-DAY COURSE AND LEFT MANY WONDERING WHAT REALLY HAD BEEN ACCOMPLISHED. THE POLICIES ANNOUNCED WERE LARGELY A FURTHER ELABORATION OF THOSE SET FOUR YEARS AGO. THE FUTURE POLITICAL OPENING RECEIVED A TWO-LINE REAFFIRMATION THAT AN ELECTION WOULD TAKE PLACE IN 1981 ON THE BASIS OF A SINGLE AGREED CANDIDATE OF BOTH TRADITIONAL PARTIES AND THAT A NEW CONSTITUTION WOULD BE WRITTEN. LITTLE IN THE WAY OF RELIEF FROM STEADILY DECLINING REAL INCOMES WAS OFFERED THE AVERAGE URUGUAYAN EXCEPT THE PROMISE THAT

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IMPORT BARRIERS WOULD BE REDUCED IN A FIVE TO EIGHT-YEAR PROGRAM, HOPEFULLY PRODUCING A DOMESTIC COMPETITION WHICH WOULD RESTRAIN CONSUMER PRICES. POLICYMAKERS APPEARED CONFIDENT INDUSTRIAL PROTECTION WOULD BE LOWERED. THERE SEEMED TO BE LITTLE ACCOMPLISHED ON AGRICULTURAL POLICY EXCEPT A GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT MORE PROFITABILITY AND LESS CONTROL WERE PREREQUISITES TO

INCREASED EFFICIENCY OF PRODUCTION. AT THE END, EX-MINISTER OF ECONOMY VEGH VILLEGAS OFFERED AN OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF 1978 WHICH DID NOT SEEM TO HAVE ITS BASE IN THE LACKLUSTER VERBIAGE OF THE 1977 CONCLAVE. END SUMMARY.

2. THIS YEAR'S CONCLAVE FILLED THE NEWS MEDIA FOR NINE DAYS BEFORE ITS CONCLUSION AND FOR A WEEK AFTER WITH OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASES AND LONG LISTS OF BROADLY PHRASED GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES. THE LIMITED, OFFICIALLY PERMITTED PRESS COVERAGE WAS LARGELY DEVOID OF REPORTING ON THE DIALOGUE AT THE MEETING, AND, ONE WEEK AFTER CONCLAVE'S CONCLUSION, MOST PEOPLE HAVE TROUBLE IDENTIFYING ITS SIGNIFICANT DECISIONS. THE LONG LIST OF GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES ORIGINALLY PRODUCED BY THE 1973 MEETINGS AT THE SAN MIGUEL AND LA NIRVANA HOTELS WERE IN THE MAIN REAFFIRMED. ALTHOUGH AGRICULTURAL POLICY WAS THE GOU'S MOST EVIDENT FAILURE OF THE YEAR -- WITH REDUCED EXPORTS, A VIRTUAL CUT-OFF OF MEAT SUPPLY TO THE DOMESTIC MARKET FOR HALF THE YEAR, AND A CONTINUING STAND-OFF BETWEEN THE MINISTER AND THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR -- "CURRENT POLICY" WAS REAFFIRMED. NEVERTHELESS THERE WAS ENOUGH VERBIAGE RECOGNIZING (A) THE NEED FOR AN INCREASED INCOME TO THE RURAL SECTOR TO SUSTAIN THE INVESTMENT NEEDED FOR MORE EFFICIENT CATTLE PRODUCTION AND (B) THE EXCESSES OF CURRENT GOVERNMENT CONTROLS TO SUGGEST THAT

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THE PROBLEM WAS VISIBLE EVEN IF THE LONGER TERM PLANNING AND POLICIES TO DEAL WITH IT WERE NOT.

3. DESPITE THE STAR-BILLED CONSIDERATION OF THE "PROTECTIONISM" ISSUE, THE CONCLAVE DID NOT PRODUCE AN AGREED SCHEDULE FOR ADJUSTMENT DOWNWARD OF EXISTING IMPORT CHARGES. THIS IS NOT VIEWED AS A SETBACK TO THE POLICY OF LOWERING PROTECTIONIST BARRIERS, HOWEVER. MINECOM ARISMENDI HAD TOLD US EARLIER THAT IT WAS NOT ESSENTIAL THAT THE CONCLAVE AGREE ON THE IMPLEMENTING DETAILS BECAUSE HE COULD DO SO UNDER HIS EXISTING AUTHORITY. THUS THE FAILURE OF THE CONCLAVE TO REVEFSE THE MOVEMENT TO LOWER IMPORT CHARGES IS VIEWED AS CONFIRMING THAT NOW THE POLICY IS FIRMLY ENOUGH ACCEPTED BY KEY MILITARY ELEMENTS TO PERMIT A SCHEDULE FOR SIGNIFICANT REDUCTIONS TO BE ANNOUNCED EARLY IN 1978.

4. THE CONCLAVE EXERCISE IS A MIXED COMMENTARY ON THE GOVERNMENTAL PROCESS IN URUGUAY. IN A GOVERNMENT NOT NOTED FOR INTEGRATING AND RATIONALIZING OBJECTIVES, IT BECOMES NECESSARY TO SEPARATE POLICYMAKERS FROM THEIR INDIVIDUAL FOCI FOR AT LEAST THIS SHORT PERIOD, AND TO

JOINTLY REVIEW EACH OTHER'S POLICIES. THE EFFECT WAS EDUCATIONAL. SUCH MEETINGS ARE ALL THE MORE NECESSARY BECAUSE OF THE LIMITED REAL DISCUSSION/CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT POLICY IN THE PRESS OR EVEN WITHIN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES. THE FAILURE OF THE GOU TO PERMIT THE PRESS TO REPORT THE VARIOUS SIDES OF OPINION IN CONCLAVE DISCUSSIONS, HOWEVER, HAS BOTH ITS NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE EFFECTS -- NEGATIVE IN THAT THE YUBLIC IS LESS AWARE OF THE ISSUES SURROUNDING CURRENT POLICY, YET POSITIVE IN THAT PARTICIPANTS ARE MORE FREE TO CRITICIZE, OR EVEN ADMIT FAILURE, TO A DEGREE PUBLIC EXPOSURE WOULD OTHERWISE LIMIT. THERE ARE STORIES OF HEATED EXCHANGES WHICH INDICATE THAT THE DISCUSSIONS WERE NOT JUST PRO FORMA AND THAT THE MILITARY-CIVILIAN DISTINCTION WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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BLURRED IN MANY POLICY DEBATES. STILL, THE FACE PUT ON THE RESULT -- AND THE VISIBLE RESULT THIS YEAR WAS UNEXCITING -- IS ONE OF AGREEMENT HARMONY AND SINGLE-MINDED FORMING UP TO MEET THE LONG LIST OF RELATIVELY GENERAL GOALS PRODUCED.

5. THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS SYNTHESIZE THE PRINCIPAL DECISIONS AND GOALS COMING OUT OF THE CONCLAVE:

A. POLITICAL: FROM "SECRET" DISCUSSIONS IN THE CONCLAVE CAME A SIMPLE PUBLIC REAFFIRMATION BY ARMY

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CINC, GENERAL VADORA, THAT THE PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED PLAN TO HOLD ELECTIONS IN 1981 WITH A SINGLE CANDIDATE CHOSEN TO REPRESENT BOTH TRADITIONAL PARTIES STILL HELD, TOGETHER WITH THE PROMISE OF A PROJECTED NEW CONSTITUTION TO BE WRITTEN BY THAT DATE.

B. AGRICULTURE: THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE HAS ATTEMPTED TO SHORTEN THE CATTLE PRODUCTION CYCLE BY FREEING THE PRICE OF 3-YEAR-OLD AND YOUNGER CATTLE BUT FIXING A DECLINING REAL PRICE FOR OLDER CATTLE. THE CONCLAVE RATIFIED A PROGRAM EXTENDING THE PRODUCERS' PERIOD TO TIME FOR CLEARING OUT OLDER STOCK AND RECOGNIZED THE SECTOR'S NEED FOR HIGHER PROFITABILITY AND LESS EXPENSIVE INPUTS AS GUIDES FOR FUTURE POLICY. HOWEVER, THIS SUBJECT APPARENTLY PRODUCED MORE ACRIMONY THAN POLICY AT THE CONCLAVE.

C. COMMERCIAL POLICY: THE GOAL OF "INTENSIVE USE OF NATIONAL FACTORS OF PRODUCTION, "E.G., LABOR AND NATURAL RESOURCES, IS TO BE FOSTERED BY (1) RE-CONFIDENTIAL

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DUCING EXPORT CHARGES OF ALL TYPES, (2) CONCOMITANTLY BRINGING DOWN TARIFFS AND OTHER IMPORT BARRIERS IN A GRADUAL 5-8 YEAR PROGRAM TO ARRIVE AT A BASIC RATE ADMINISTERED BY A SINGLE AGENCY, AND (3) SIMULTANEOUSLY REDUCING EXPORT SUBSIDIES, GRADUALLY, AS A FUNCTION OF EXCHANGE POLICY. KEY ECONOMIC DECISION-MAKERS IN THE GOVERNMENT PRIVATELY EXPRESSED SATISFACTION THAT BY THE TIME OF THE CONCLAVE, DOMINANT ELEMENTS OF THE MILITARY HAD BEEN CONVINCED THAT COSTS OF "PROTECTIONISM" WERE EXCESSIVE AND IMPORT BARRIERS NEEDED TO BE LOWERED. WHILE INFLATION WAS STRESSED AS A KEY OBSTACLE TO GROWTH IN THE ECONOMY, INCREASING DOMESTIC INDUSTRIAL EFFICIENCY THROUGH NEW COMPETITION FROM INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTS WAS ALSO PROMINENTLY BILLED AS A MAJOR PART OF THE CURE. GOVERNMENT CREDITS WERE PROMISED FOR THE TASK OF "INDUSTRIAL RECONVERSION" AHEAD. IN A PLETHORA OF OFFICIAL REPORTS DURING THE NINE DAYS OF CONCLAVE, THERE WERE FEW POPULIST ANNOUNCEMENTS THAT MADE THE PROSPECTS FOR THE WAGE EARNER NOTABLY BRIGHTER. WITH THE WAGE EARNERS' HOPES FOR INCREASED REAL INCOME RESTING HEAVILY ON "DEPROTECTIONISM," IT WILL BE LESS EASY TO TAKE UP THE NATIONALISTIC

ARGUMENTS AGAINST IT.

D. MONETARY POLICY: UNDER THIS HEADING THE CONCLAVE PROGRAM AGAIN STRESSED THE BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF PERMITTING COMPETITION FROM IMPORTS AND CORRECTION OF (PRINCIPALLY FOOD) SHORTAGES THROUGH IMPORTATION, USING RECENTLY GAINED FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES. REAL POSITIVE RATES OF INTEREST ARE TO BE ENCOURAGED THROUGH REMOVAL OF GOVERNMENT CONTROLS ON RATE MAXIMUMS -- NOW ALREADY REMOVED IN EFFECT THROUGH DECREE OF AN AMPLE 90 PERCENT MAXIMUM. (CREDIT  
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POLICY IS ALREADY BEING USED AGAINST INFLATION TO A "FELT MAXIMUM," WITH PESO CREDIT IN SHORT SUPPLY AND COMMERCIALBANKS COMPLAINING OF LACK OF PROFIT-ABILITY UNDER CURRENT RESTRICTIONS.) ON EXCHANGE POLICY, THE VIRTUAL UNIFICATION OF THE COMMERCIAL AND FINANCIAL RATES WAS CITED AND THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF IRREGULAR PERIODIC MINI-DEVALUATIONS WAS RE-AFFIRMED. DURING THE CONCLAVE, THE CENTRAL BANK TOOK THE OCCASION OF A DROP IN INTERNATIONAL DOLLAR RATES TO ANNOUNCE A MINISCULE REVALUATION OF THE COMMERCIAL RATE FOR THE PESO AGAINST THE DOLLAR.

E. INCOMES/PRICE POLICY: MINISTER OF ECONOMY ARISMENDI WAS SURPRISINGLY FRANK TO THE PRESS IN RESPONDING TO THE QUESTION OF WHETHER REAL INCOMES WERE GOING TO INCREASE IN THE COMING YEAR WITH "NO ONE CAN TELL YOU THAT ... WEALTH IS NOT CREATED BY DECREES." MINIMAL MEASURES AFFECTING REAL INCOME TAKEN AT THE TIME OF THE CONCLAVE INCLUDED A 7 PERCENT SALARY INCREASE DECREED FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYEES (AND SET AS A MINIMUM FOR PRIVATE EMPLOYEES), A LOWERING OF THE VALUE-ADDED TAX FROM 20 PERCENT TO 18 PERCENT, AND EXEMPTION OF YEAR-END "THIRTEENTH MONTH SALARY" FROM SOCIAL CHARGES. LOOKING AHEAD TO A YEAR IN WHICH TAPERING OFF OF MAJOR CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES MAY COMBINE WITH SOME SLOWDOWN IN EXPORT INDUSTRY GROWTH AS EXPORT SUBSIDIES ARE CUT, THE GOU IS CONCERNED TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT. OFFICIAL DATA ALREADY SHOW INCREASING UNEMPLOYMENT OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS (FROM 8.1 TO 12.8 PERCENT OF THE WORK FORCE) AS MORE FAMILY MEMBERS HAVE ENTERED THE JOB MARKET, PRIMARILY TO SUPPLEMENT DECLINING REAL EARNINGS OF THE PRINCIPAL BREAD-WINNER. THIS CONCERN WAS HIGHLIGHTED BY REPEATED MENTION DURING THE CONCLAVE OF THE NEED TO GENERATE NEW EMPLOYMENT. TO SMOOTH OUT THE MONETARY EFFECTS OF THE INFREQUENT AND LARGER WAGE CHANGES OF RECENT YEARS,  
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MINISTELMARISMENDI ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD SET MORE FREQUENT BUT SMALLER WAGE INCREASES. AT THE SAME TIME SOME PRICES (E.G., RESTAURANT CHARGES) WERE FREED FROM CONTROL OF THE OFFICIAL PRICE REGULATION AGENCY (COPRIN).

F. LABOR LEGISLATION, REFORM OF SOCIAL SECURITY: BOTH OF THESE SUBJECTS ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED FOR CONCLAVE CONSIDERATION CAME OUT WITHOUT FURTHER DEFINITION, PENDING FURTHER WORK BY STUDY COMMISSIONS. PRESS REPORTS INDICATED THAT IN THE "NEAR FUTURE" EXPERIENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT-PROPOSED (BUT ALMOST UNIVERSALLY IGNORED) SYSTEM OF MIXED EMPLOYEE/MANAGEMENT BARGAINING COMMISSIONS IN EACH

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PLANT WOULD BE USED AS THE BASIS FOR NEW LEGISLATION. IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL SECURITY, THE CONCLAVE ACKNOWLEDGED THE PROBLEM THE COUNTRY FACES IN TRYING TO BECOME COMPETITIVE INTERNATIONALLY WHEN HIGH SOCIAL SECURITY CHARGES ARE BUILT DIRECTLY INTO

THE COST OF PRODUCTION. THE GOU ANNOUNCED THE INTENTION TO EVENTUALLY FINANCE THESE SERVICES OUT OF GENERAL TAX REVENUES. THE OBJECTIVE WAS CITED WITHOUT ELABORATION. OTHER REPORTAGE EMPHASIZED THAT THE "PRIVATIZATION" OF THESE SERVICES, ESPECIALLY MEDICAL SERVICES, WAS ALSO A GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVE. THESE TWO APPROACHES TO CHANGE IN THE SYSTEM RUN IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS, INDICATING THAT THE GOU HAS YET TO FOCUS SERIOUSLY ON THE FUTURE OF ITS SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM.

6. COMMENT: WHILE THIS YEAR'S MORE EXTENSIVE PREPACONFIDENTIAL

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RATIONS FOR THE CONCLAVE REVIEW OF EACH MINISTRY AND ENTITY'S PERFORMANCE LED TO A MORE DETAILED SETTING FORTH OF GOALS AND PROGRAMS, SOME INCONSISTENCIES REMAINED. ARISMENDI, THE MOST VISIBLE FIGURE OF THE CONCLAVE, PROMISED IMPROVED REAL INCOME DURING 1977 IN LAST DECEMBER'S CONCLAVE BUT MADE NO SIMILAR PROMISES FOR THE COMING YEAR. THERE WAS IN FACT LITTLE IN THE WAY OF POPULIST OFFERINGS TO THE AVERAGE CITIZEN -- THE 7 PERCENT SALARY INCREASE ANNOUNCED IN THE CONCLAVE LEFT HIM ABOUT 12-14 PERCENT LESS REAL INCOME THAN HE HAD A YEAR EARLIER AND A SALES TAX REDUCED BY 10 PERCENT WAS A SMALL ADDITIONAL OFFERING. YET THE STILL VERY VISIBLE EX-MINISTER OF ECONOMY AND FINANCE VEGH VILLEGAS COMMENTED FROM THE CONCLAVE THAT HE INDEED SAW A PERIOD OF GROWTH AHEAD, " IN WHICH ALL THE VARIABLES ARE GOING TO MOVE IN THE SAME DIRECTION ... PRODUCTION IS GOING TO INCREASE, INCOME IS GOING TO INCREASE, AND THE PURCHASING POWER OF THE INDIVIDUAL IS GOING TO GO UP." IT SEEMED STRANGE THAT THE PRUDENT ECONOMIST WAS OUT AHEAD OF THE OTHERWISE LACKLUSTER AND EVEN RESTRAINED PRONOUNCEMENTS OF THE MINISTRIES. VEGH SEEMED TO BE TELEGRAPHING PROSPECTS FOR BETTER TIMES DESPITE CURRENT PREDICTIONS THAT NEXT YEAR MAY NOT BE AS GOOD AS 1977. THE BASIS FOR THOSE PREDICTIONS REMAINS TO BE SEEN. BUT LOCAL BUSINESSMEN ARE COMMENTING THAT LARGER ECONOMIC STIMULUS TO WARRENT VEGH'S STATEMENTS IS BEING HELD FOR GENERAL GREGORIO ALVAREZ TO ANNOUNCE WHEN HE ASSUMES DUTIES AS ARMY CINC NEXT FEBRUARY. PEZZULLO

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